

American

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Secretary Clinton Condemns Attack on U.S. Consulate in Peshawar

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The terrorist attack against the U.S. Consulate General in Peshawar, Pakistan, was meant to undermine Pakistani democracy and “sow fear and discord” in the country, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said April 5.

Clinton condemned what has been described in news reports as a series of three coordinated bomb attacks near the consulate that killed seven people.

“I am outraged and deeply saddened by the assault on our consulate in Peshawar. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the Pakistani security personnel who were killed and all those who were injured,” Clinton said.

“Attacks on diplomatic missions strike at the heart of international cooperation and are unacceptable in any country at any time. We condemn this attack on our mission, the recent bombings in Baghdad that targeted other diplomatic missions, and all such crimes,” she said.

She said U.S. personnel are closely coordinating with Pakistani authorities investigating the attack, and she expressed deep appreciation for “the quick, effective support of Pakistani security forces” as the incident unfolded.

Clinton added that the tragedy underscores “the common challenges our nations” face and deepens the U.S. commitment to strengthen its partnership with Pakistan. “The Pakistani people have suffered grievous losses, but they are standing firm in the face of this intimidation — and the United States stands with them,” she said.

It was the first attack against a U.S. diplomatic facility in Pakistan since 2006. State Department Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs P.J. Crowley told reporters April 5 that no Americans had been killed.

According to an April 5 statement by the U.S. Consulate General in Peshawar, the attack “involved a vehicle suicide bomb and terrorists attempting to enter the building using grenades and weapons fire,” and at least two of those killed were Pakistani security guards who had been employed by the consulate general.

The attack came a few hours after a suicide bomber attacked a political rally and reportedly killed 43 people in Lower Dir, approximately 80 kilometers northeast of Peshawar.

The attacks in Lower Dir and on the U.S. Consulate reflect “the terrorists’ desperation as they are rejected by people throughout Pakistan,” the consulate general’s statement said.

Intensive Two Months Ahead to Boost Nonproliferation Efforts

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The agreement between the United States and Russia to reduce their nuclear arsenals under the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) marks an important step toward President Obama’s vision of a world without nuclear weapons. It also marks the start of what will be an intensive two months as his administration seeks support from the international community to safeguard the world’s nuclear material from extremists and traffickers and to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Ambassador Susan Burk, the president’s special representative for nuclear nonproliferation, told an audience at a State Department conference March 30 that the START agreement was “a very significant accomplishment,” and that as its details emerge, the world will appreciate “how truly complex this agreement was and how amazing it was that they were able to conclude this in under a year.”

But with START accomplished, efforts are under way to reach a wide international consensus on securing nuclear materials and strengthening the NPT, as well as moves to cut off the production of fissile materials and achieve U.S. Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). “The U.S., now at the highest levels, is trying to get these done and finish these up so we can move on to the next steps” toward the goal of ultimately eliminating nuclear weapons, Burk said.

Before more than 40 nations gather in Washington April 12–13 for the Nuclear Security Summit, President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev will have signed the new START in Prague April 8. The White House also announced that the president will release an updated nuclear posture review April 6 that Burk said “will demonstrate the move toward reducing the role of nuclear weapons” in U.S. national security strategy.

Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins, the coordinator for threat reduction programs at the State Department, said the Nuclear Security Summit aims at reaching “a common understanding of the threat posed by nuclear terrorism,” and agreement on the importance of securing nuclear material.

"Terrorists appear determined to buy, build or steal a weapon or nuclear material [such as] highly enriched uranium or plutonium and turn these raw materials into a nuclear device," Jenkins said. "We also know that large quantities of these materials are present in both civilian and military programs."

The danger from this "can touch us all," and requires nations to address the threat collectively, she said.

NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY

In May, the Obama administration hopes to "lock in" areas where the international community agrees on strengthening the NPT, which Burk described as "the foundation we need in order to make progress on nuclear disarmament."

The NPT rests on three pillars: disarmament, nonproliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. In his April 2009 speech in Prague, President Obama said the NPT is a bargain between those states possessing nuclear weapons and those without. Countries with nuclear weapons agree to move toward disarmament, countries without nuclear weapons agree not to acquire them, and all countries have the right to access peaceful nuclear energy.

While Burk said the 1970 treaty "may be an imperfect instrument," it is "the best we have" and "we could never recreate it today." All signatories not only have a strong interest in saving the NPT, but also in trying to strengthen it and further its implementation, she said.

She pointed out that the desire for cleaner energy due to climate change concerns will increase demand for nuclear power reactors, and that the international community must find a way to address that demand along with the accompanying safety, security and proliferation concerns.

"Without a robust and reliable nonproliferation regime, it would be very difficult to pursue the peaceful uses of nuclear energy in the way that countries are talking about now," she said.

Burk was cautious about the likelihood that an agreement will be reached by the time the NPT review conference concludes at the end of May. Since the treaty operates by consensus, any one of its 189 signatories can block new measures. The Obama administration has been trying to get a sense of others' priorities and look for areas of potential agreement.

"If we can come to the conference and we can tease out those areas where we agree on all three pillars ... and if we can lock those in, then we can move forward and we will certainly be in a better position," she said. "I do think

that there is an area of agreement there that we can capture if the parties come to the conference prepared to do that."

NO NUCLEAR TESTING

Obama is also trying to break the deadlock holding up a fissile material cutoff treaty, which would prohibit countries from producing any more fissile material for nuclear weapons or other explosive devices. In addition, Burk said, he has outlined steps for the U.S. Senate to ratify the CTBT, but she noted that even without ratification there has been a U.S. moratorium on nuclear testing since 1992, and "there are no plans to test."

"We're trying to lead by example," Burk said. "We are making it very clear that we want to lead by actions and not just words. But we can't do that alone."

Joseph Cirincione, who is president of the Ploughshares Fund, a global security foundation based in Washington, told the conference that the American push to eradicate nuclear weapons originally came from veteran security and military experts, such as former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and former Defense Secretary William Perry. A "paradigm shift occurred" from the center of the American political spectrum, and Obama has embraced it, he said.

But Cirincione warned that with the \$54 billion that is spent annually in the United States on nuclear weapons for defense contracts, jobs and laboratories, there are powerful interests that want to maintain the status quo, and he urged conference attendees to mobilize public and government support.

Obama said "I cannot do this alone," Cirincione said. "We have got to seize this policy moment because as surely as it has opened up, it will close. It will not stay here very long."

United States, Asian Development Bank Protect Environment

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reaches out to meet global challenges

Washington — The United States is building on its partnership with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to strengthen global environmental protection, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced April 2.

The ADB is an international development finance institution dedicated to helping its developing country members reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of their people. Headquartered in Manila, the ADB is

owned and financed by its 67 members, of whom 48 are from the region and 19 (including the United States) are from other parts of the globe.

"The U.S. recognizes the importance of Asia in meeting today's global environmental challenges," said Michelle DePass, assistant administrator for EPA's Office of International and Tribal Affairs. "It is our hope that expanding our partnership with ADB will help focus the technical and financial resources necessary to address those challenges."

On March 30, DePass met with ADB's managing director-general, Rajat Nag, to sign a new letter of intent between EPA and the ADB. The original letter of intent, signed April 2005, was due to expire in April 2010.

EPA's five years of successful cooperation with the ADB under the original agreement have included ADB support of the Methane to Markets Partnership and EPA's work with China's Ministry of Environment on a cap-and-trade program for sulfur dioxide.

During their March 30 meeting, DePass and Nag discussed ways in which U.S.-ADB cooperation could reinforce efforts of Asian governments seeking to strengthen their environmental laws, ministries and compliance mechanisms. DePass and Nag also explored strategies for reducing emissions of air pollutants and greenhouse gases in the region.

The new letter of intent expands on cooperation in areas such as environmental governance and climate change. The initial areas of cooperation listed for 2010 through 2015 include air quality, safe drinking water, toxic substances control, environmental governance and water resource management. As EPA and ADB identify additional joint priorities, the letter of intent provides a mechanism for ADB to use EPA technical expertise in designing and implementing key initiatives. Cooperation also could include training and joint project development, according to the EPA.

Maryland County Celebrates Arab-American Heritage

Samira Hussein promotes Arab culture in her community

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — It all began with a phone call from Samira Hussein in 1998.

In the late 1990s, the Palestinian-born American was active in a community multicultural group. Each member would host a gathering that highlighted their culture, usually at a restaurant.

When Hussein suggested holding an Arab heritage night, she learned from group members that Arabs, unlike some other ethnic groups, did not have an officially sanctioned heritage month in Maryland.

Hussein, a resident of Montgomery County, Maryland, sprang into action. Determined to honor her heritage, she phoned county officials to request an Arab-American heritage month.

The next day, Hussein received a phone call from the Montgomery County Executive's Office and with it came good news: Arab American Heritage Month in Montgomery County was born.

"I was so excited by this that I got my husband, my children, three or four other people who I could find on very short notice," Hussein said. "And we showed up at County Executive Douglas Duncan's office and I accepted a proclamation."

Nearly 15 years later, Hussein continues to accept proclamations from Montgomery County that honor its citizens of Arab heritage. On March 31, county officials presented Hussein's Arab American Heritage Month Committee with a proclamation.

"I, Isiah Leggett, as County Executive, proclaim April 2010 as Arab American Heritage Month in Montgomery County, Maryland," reads the proclamation. "I encourage our residents to join us in recognizing the achievements of the Arab-American community and to participate in the month's celebrations."

San Francisco celebrates its Arab American Heritage Month in October and Chicago honors Arab Americans throughout November.

Lily Qi, Montgomery County's community liaison and language access coordinator, told America.gov that Arab American Heritage Month is a community-inspired event.

"Arab Americans in Montgomery County are doing very well and are an integral part of our community," Qi said. She added that such events strengthen communities. "The more you reinforce the presence of these groups in society, the more stereotypes are broken."

Held at the Montgomery County Executive Offices, the proclamation ceremony featured Arab-American speakers who discussed the contributions of Arabs to American society.

Georgetown University's director of educational outreach at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Zeina Azzam Seikaly, honored American women of Arab heritage, including actress Salma Hayek and late

astronaut Christa McAuliffe.

Next came Mazen Basrawi, the counsel to the U.S. assistant attorney general for civil rights. "I'm very proud of what I've seen my government do the last few months to defend the rights of Arab Americans," he said. "We are litigating two cases right now concerning two women who want to wear religious hair covering in the workplace."

Basrawi, who was appointed to his position by U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, works on issues relating to disability, racial and religious discrimination.

Arab American Heritage Month features a festival organized by Hussein and her Arab American Heritage Committee that highlights Arab culture. This year's festival, to be held April 11 under the theme "In Unity, We Build a Caring Community," will showcase poetry readings, arts and crafts, calligraphy exhibits, dancing and Middle Eastern food.

Sponsored by the City of Gaithersburg's Multicultural Affairs Committee, the festival is attended by the mayor and city council members. Hussein said that last year's festival drew more than 500 people despite heavy rains.

"We are on the main highway and people join us after coming from church, and the smell of the food attracts people," Hussein said. Some years the festival is not held because of the amount of work involved for her small committee. "We use our husbands and our children to set up and clean up," she said.

A major part of Arab American Heritage Month is teaching. With support from the local board of education, Hussein's committee highlights Arab heritage by placing books, posters and Arab clothing in schools and public libraries county-wide.

Hussein also spearheaded a 30-minute educational presentation on Arab Americans that was shown for several years throughout the school system.

"Last year we had many requests to feature Arab culture, but we could only do so many," Hussein said.

U.S. Students Explore Russian Language and Culture

Interest in Russian on the rise, educators say

By Julia LaVilla-Nossova
Staff Writer

Washington — In December 2009, students at Langley High School in McLean, Virginia, dressed in traditional Russian costumes and performed pieces by Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky, Glinka and Rimsky-

Korsakov. They recited poems by Pushkin and Lermontov in Russian.

These students are enrolled in one of the largest Russian language programs in a U.S. secondary school. At Langley High School, the number of students in Russian language courses has increased nearly eightfold over the last 20 years.

In New York City, the prestigious Staten Island Technical High School requires four years of Russian from its more than 1,000 students. For the most proficient learners, college-level Russian studies courses are offered in collaboration with the State University of New York at Albany.

According to the Committee on College and Pre-College Russian, sponsored by several U.S. academic and educational organizations, there is a new interest in studying Russian at American secondary schools and colleges. The number of Russian programs offered by American schools dropped significantly after the end of the Cold War, but many surviving programs have reported an increase in new enrollments. Although some programs are fighting to stay open, new ones are being created for the first time in years, according to committee reports.

Business opportunities in Russia and the country's new visibility on the world stage are the most-often cited reasons for the renewed interest in learning Russian. Another factor is the U.S. government's promotion of less frequently studied languages, including Russian, at all levels of U.S. education. For example, while most Russian language programs at the secondary-school level are supported by local school systems, some benefit from a government-sponsored language initiative for youth known as NSLI-Y, which provides merit-based scholarships for overseas study in Russian, Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Hindi, Korean, Farsi and Turkish.

"The Department of State was pleased to launch in 2009 the NSLI-Y program that provides American high school students a unique experience to learn and use Russian in Russia for periods ranging from six weeks to nine months," said Maura Pally, acting assistant secretary of state for educational and cultural affairs. "This exciting initiative provides linguistic building blocks and motivates students to continue language study when they return to the United States, ultimately paving the way for mutual understanding and better relations."

In 2010-11, NSLI-Y will provide 650 foreign-study scholarships, of which 140 will go to American secondary school students who want to learn Russian in Russian classrooms and interact with Russian peers.

Cross-cultural understanding is a critical component of language training in the United States. At Langley High School, students participate in annual cultural exchanges: U.S. students live with Russian families for 10 days, and then receive their Russian student hosts a month later, says Valentin Cukierman, one of the Russian language teachers at the school. Staten Island Technical offers a similar two-week program with a secondary school in Moscow.

Personal contacts and exposure to a foreign culture are as important as language proficiency, and in some cases may prove a life-changing experience, educators say. "The most memorable part of the trip was the people I met in Russia. I will never forget any of them," wrote Chelsea M. about her recent travel on a NSLI-Y scholarship. "Coming to Russia I did not know what to expect. I simply came with a positive attitude and made the most of every moment during this amazing summer."

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